

“It would be nice to know...one day that they won’t need American support, and that they can operate totally on their own, come up with their own training, come up with their own planning...and hopefully one day...this place can be something special and don’t have to worry about somebody blowing your kids up...or walking into a school and killing a bunch of people. Just, you know, having a feeling of safety, everywhere.”

SSgt Terrance D. Brinegar, AST member



Above: A lone ISF (police) member stands guard outside the Fallujah CMOC, the site of frequent small arms attacks.



*“I like the fact that we’re
building something...we’re try-
ing to actually develop and
build something that we’ll
leave behind that might give
the Iraqi people a better way
of life.”*

SSgt Clarence E. Stephens, MTT 2





*“I met people and I established
important friendships that I
am going to miss when I leave
here.”*

Sgt Sean C. Lawlor

Epilogue

The military forces of the United States have now been engaged in Iraq for a full five years. Presently lasting longer than World War II, this fight seems destined to become the longest engagement in our military history, even surpassing the American Revolution and the Vietnam War. The reason for our involvement in Iraq is varied but ultimately it is a struggle to allow a people to choose their own destiny free from terrorism and violent coercion.

The story of the U.S. Marine Corps involvement in Iraq is just now beginning to get told and fortunately, Lieutenant Colonel David A. Benhoff was there to chronicle part of it. Acting in his capacity as a field historian for the History Division, and deftly combining his combat training with his skill with a camera, Benhoff's stunning photography shows a little seen side of the war. Part of the reason for this greater lack of public understanding about the reality of what is going on in Iraq is due to a dearth of media coverage on the "little things" that happen in war that ultimately add up to big things. More media attention has been given to the omnipresent and random violence of the past three years. But other things just as important frequently got overlooked. Things such as Iraqi schoolchildren walking unafraid past bullet pocked-marked buildings but still attending school, intense Arab sheiks meeting with Marine commanders to discuss security concerns, or battle-hardened Marine sergeants performing the simple act of handing out candy to trusting Iraqi children as their smiling parents look on. All of these "little things" add up toward winning a war of trust—a war that will ultimately determine the outcome of the long struggle.

In Iraq, Marines transitioned themselves from a traditional combat force to one that started looking after the "little things"—things they knew add up to overall success. This transition, also known as the "three block war," a term coined by General Charles C. Krulak, the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, requires that Marines not only know how to conduct highly lethal combat operations, but in a moment's notice or even simultaneously, also deliver humanitarian aid or assist in other civic actions often in close proximity to each other. Thus most Marines see that we will win this war one sheik or village at a time. Through patient persistence, despite the interruption of operations by what seems to the outsider a random and mindless violence, Lieutenant Colonel Benhoff has shown Marines winning the war, not necessarily with their rifles, but with the consistent and kind application of presence.

Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

The Author

Lieutenant Colonel David A. Benhoff, a reservist with the Marine Corps History Division, deployed to Iraq in 2005 as a field historian with II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward). During his tour, he traveled throughout the Multi-National Forces - West area of operations in al Anbar Province, recording history in the making. While the main focus of his mission was to conduct and record oral history interviews with Marines and collect historically relevant documents, he capitalized on his personal interest in photography to visually capture the experiences of both Marines and Iraqis as he traveled. As he put it: “The photographs in this book tell an important part of the story, mostly untold. Where the rubber meets the road and Marines are interacting with Iraqis on a personal level, there is genuine cooperation—and even friendship. The photographs portray what occurs the vast majority of the time and I don’t think most Americans realize this; it is my hope this book will add to the complete picture by illustrating the ‘no better friend’ aspect of the fight—a critical element of earning and maintaining the good will of the people and thus our long-term success.”



Left: LtCol Benhoff interviews Maj Chris Phelps and Sgt Sean Lawlor, both with 5th Civil Affairs Group, Camp Fallujah.



Above: Photographer becomes subject, when a young Iraqi boy photographs LtCol Benhoff near Karmah.

